

SDMS, W. M.

INTERVIEW.

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SIMMS. W. M. INTERVIEW.

James R. Carselovey, Field Worker
Indian-Pioneer History
July 26, 1937

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Interview with Wm. Simms,
South Miller Street, Vinita,
Oklahoma.

My name is W. M. Simms. I live on South Miller Street, Vinita, Oklahoma. I am now serving as United States Commissioner at Vinita. Prior to holding this position I served a number of years as Indian Probate Commissioner, and had under my jurisdiction the handling of all probate and other matters among the Indians of northeastern Oklahoma.

I first came to the Indian Territory in 1885, as a tinner, and went to work for Ed and Billie Miller, who had just bought out Arch Goddykoontz, who one year before had opened Vinita's first hardware store. I operated the tin shop for them as long as they stayed in business, then I went into business for myself and was working at that trade when the Spanish-American War broke out.

CAPTAIN G. S. WHITE MUSTERS COMPANY

Captain G. S. White, then acting as a deputy United States Marshal in this district in 1898 mustered a company of Mounted Infantrymen under President McKinley's call for volunteers to fight in the Spanish-American War. I was as big and strong as any blacksmith, and I felt it my duty to offer my

services, and was at once accepted.

Captain White's company was not used in the way he had intended it, and we were consolidated with Roosevelt's Rough Riders, and were mustered in at Muskogee, where a troop of 85 was sent to San Antonio, Texas, and from there to Tampa, Florida, and from there to Cuba.

FIRST SKIRMISH AT LA QUISIMA

When we landed in Cuba, the disembarkation commenced at Daiquiri, with feints by the Cubans and the navy at various shore points, in order to mislead the enemy, as to the place of landing. When we did land we could not get close enough to the shore to make our landing safely, and many of our horses were drowned, as were several men. Our mules could be headed toward the shore, and would go straight for the bank, but the horses would swim in circles, until some of them were drowned.

Then two days later came the first battle for the new forces, with the battle of La Quisima, in which sixteen Rough Riders and regulars were killed, and forty wounded.

Tilden W. Dawson, a private from Vinita, Okla-

homa, was the first man killed from our home town. He was killed on June 24, 1898.

OTHER OKLAHOMA BOYS KILLED

Others from Oklahoma who were killed in battle were: Wm. T. Santo, private, Choteau, killed in battle of San Juan July 1, 1898; Milo A. Hendricks, Muskogee, who was a member of Miss Alice Robertson's Sunday School class, died July 6, 1898, from a rifle wound received in battle; Silas R. Enyart, Sapulpa, was shot in battle July 1, 1898, and died July 6, 1898; Captain Richard C. Day, Vinita, shot in left shoulder and died later.

John R. Thomas, Jr., Muskogee, was wounded in right leg in battle of La Quisima, on June 24, 1898, but did not die from this wound. John R. Thomas, Sr., father of this young man was a very dear friend of mine, and when the call came for volunteers for the Spanish-American War, he was serving as United States Judge for the Northern District.

When the war ended and it came time for the boys to be mustered out, our regiment was so badly scattered that they just came home a few at a time. Many of

them were in hospitals and could not leave until they were well enough to be mustered out.

JUDGE THOMAS HELD BANQUET FOR US

When enough of us had reached Vinita, Judge Thomas, who was holding court at Vinita, had a big banquet spread in the Thomason Hotel for us. He acted as toastmaster and had us all strung around a long table that reached clear across a long dining room, and there were many guests. We were all just hungry soldiers, and were anxiously waiting for the Judge's word to "come and get it" but he wasn't in any hurry. He was very much interested in what took place over there, and wanted to hear from each one of the boys, as we went along. We would eat awhile, then talk awhile.

Finally we had all made our little talks, but "fighting John Davis." He had not been the least bit afraid of the Spaniards but just couldn't seem to muster up courage to face that bunch at the banquet table. Judge Thomas then said, "Johnnie, what did you say when you started up the San Juan Hill?" Johnnie answered, "I didn't say anything--just kept on shooting." With that Judge Thomas let him off.

JUDGE THOMAS SHOT

Several years later, when Judge John R. Thomas was in the private practice of law he went to McAlester to help get a man out of the penitentiary, when a riot occurred in the prison and he was shot.

WORK AMONG THE INDIANS

It was after my return from the army that I served as U. S. Indian Field Clerk at Vinita. My work took me into the hills and among the poorer class of Indians, and I witnessed much suffering and hardship among them.

On one of the trips I refer to I was at the home of Old Aunt Sallie Tag, who lived on Cochran's Prairie near Kenwood. It was on Sunday, and her daughter-in-law lay a corpse in her house. I was sitting in the kitchen about noon, and I did not see anyone making any move toward getting anything to eat, and I asked Aunt Sallie if they had anything to cook. She told me they had not had anything since Friday, but she was going to pick some cotton tomorrow, and would get something. I went to a nearby store and bought them a supply of groceries, and after a bit a little Indian boy came out under a shade tree where I was sitting and said, "You good man." I asked why and he replied

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"Cause you give um grocery." I said, "Oh, that wasn't much." he said, "Yes, but it keep wrinkle out of belly long time."